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8 August 1984
FB TM 84-032

Trends

This issue includes . . .

- Soviet maneuvering on arms talks
- Moscow on GDR-FRG relations

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Correction to the 1 August 1984 Trends

On page 1, V. Kulikov is incorrectly identified as head of a sector in the Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the CPSU Central Committee. The Kulikov who wrote the Kommunist article was economist V. Kulikov (deputy director of the Institute of Economics) rather than historian V. Kulikov, who works at the Institute of Marxism-Leninism.

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China-UK-Hong Kong

Beijing Registers Satisfaction at Howe Talks on Hong Kong

Beijing has portrayed talks during British Foreign Secretary Howe's visit as having made significant progress toward a Sino-British accord on the reversion of Hong Kong after nearly two years of painstaking negotiations. Selective treatment of the details of the talks suggests a desire to play down any implication of PRC concession to British demands while reassuring the Hong Kong public of China's good intentions with respect to the territory's future.

Beijing's upbeat assessment of Howe's 27-31 July visit—his second in three months—was reflected in remarks by Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian on the 31st, reported by Xinhua that day. Wu observed that the two sides had reached “fairly identical” views, so that “it can be said that a breakthrough has been made” in the negotiations. Asked whether an agreement was possible by September, the deadline set by Beijing last fall, Wu responded that “it is possible to initiate an agreement as scheduled.” Xinhua added that to attain this goal, the two sides decided to schedule another meeting of their foreign ministers at the United Nations General Assembly in New York. Presumably, this would afford an occasion to iron out any outstanding issues not resolved in ongoing meetings of the working groups headed by ambassadorial-level officials, perhaps enabling the two sides to initial an accord on the eve of China's National Day.

A similarly optimistic joint press communique, also transmitted by Xinhua on the 31st, stated that the talks produced “significant progress” toward the “common” objective of reaching “an early agreement.” In contrast, the communique marking the conclusion of Howe's April visit had noted more modestly that “further progress” had been attained in deliberations on an accord which “both sides hoped to reach” on the issue (Beijing radio, 18 April).

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Beijing's satisfaction at the outcome of the talks was apparent in treatment of Howe's courtesy meeting with Deng Xiaoping on the 31st. According to Xinhua that day, Deng "praised" the progress made by the two sides as "worth congratulating." Xinhua added that during their "friendly and cordial" meeting, Deng conveyed his gratitude to Prime Minister Thatcher for her sustained "attention" to the Hong Kong question. The PRC-controlled Hong Kong press reported further that Deng compared Mrs. Thatcher's contribution to that of De Gaulle in ending French colonial rule. *Ta Kung Pao* on 1 August observed that Deng, who had "never gone that far" in praising the British prime minister, thus demonstrated his great satisfaction with the results of Howe's visit. These accounts of Deng's positive remarks contrast sharply with those following Howe's meeting with Deng in April. Xinhua's 18 April report was conspicuously devoid of any suggestion of a cordial atmosphere and portrayed Deng as forcefully arguing the validity of the Chinese position.

Compromise

Beijing media at first refrained from providing detailed information on the substance of the Howe-Wu talks, letting the British foreign secretary be the first to elaborate on the results of his discussions. At a 1 August news conference in Hong Kong, according to Hong Kong media, Howe disclosed that the two sides had made "very substantial progress" in three specific areas: They agreed on the "framework and key clauses" of an accord; they accepted the principle that the agreement and its annexes will be "legally binding"; and they agreed to establish a joint liaison group to facilitate the transition to Chinese rule.

Beijing's selective treatment of these details in its own media suggests a calculated effort to play down any hint of Chinese compromise on troublesome aspects of the negotiations. PRC reports on Howe's remarks and a Foreign Ministry Information Department spokesman's statement released by Xinhua late on 1 August, after Howe's press conference, made no reference to the "legally binding" nature of the agreement. This has been a priority item on the British agenda, according to Western media, while Beijing has insisted on unequivocal sovereignty after reversion.

Instead, Chinese media accounts focused on the formation of the joint liaison group, a Chinese priority. On this point, the Information Department spokesman confirmed Howe's assertion that the group's functions would not include any administrative or supervisory role, a concern raised in both British and Hong Kong media.

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Unlike Beijing media, the PRC-controlled Hong Kong press provided considerable detail on the Sino-British talks, portraying China as reasonable and forthcoming in seeking a smooth transition to the post-1997 period. For example, *Ta Kung Pao* on 1 August was explicit in reporting compromise on whether the agreement should cover a set of general principles (Beijing's preference) or a set of specific arrangements (favored by London) and in resolving differences over the joint liaison group. A *Ta Kung Pao* editorial on 2 August reflected Chinese concern over public confidence in the colony, declaring that once the agreement takes effect both sides will be obliged "strictly to observe it." This "reliable guarantee," the paper said, will give the people of Hong Kong "full confidence" in the future. (U/FOUO)

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